

# Pandemic planning

By Mark J. Mullins

## Before you begin

Contact your human resources department to see if your organization has a pandemic preparedness plan. If so, review the plan before your session to identify key points to review and discuss. If your facility does not have a pandemic plan, use this information to help develop one. Be sure to include a cross section of employees to develop the policy. Most county health departments already have a plan in place, and they can assist you in developing one for your company.

**Note:** See [www.flu.gov/professional/business/businesschecklist.html](http://www.flu.gov/professional/business/businesschecklist.html), for an example of a disaster plan and a checklist of items to consider when designing a plan.



## Introduction

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by viruses. In the United States, the flu season begins in the fall and ends in the spring. The type of flu you get during this season is called seasonal flu.

A new type of flu virus sometimes emerges to which the public has no resistance. The lack of immunity allows the virus to spread rapidly and easily from person to person worldwide. The virus may impact communities and workplaces in a very short time. This kind of flu is called pandemic flu.

Another recently discovered type of flu is the Avian Influenza, better known as bird flu. The H5N1 virus that infects birds and domestic poultry causes this flu. This virus has infected humans, and it results from human contact with infected poultry or surfaces contaminated with secretions/excretions from infected birds.

## How a pandemic influenza could affect your workplace

When an influenza pandemic occurs, it will be widespread and severe affecting many worldwide. Depending upon the circumstances, the pandemic may last from several months to several years. Businesses need to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

Such a pandemic will affect employee absenteeism. Experts predict as many as 40 percent of the work force will be absent at one time. One of the reasons for the high absence rate will be due to employees having to stay home to take care of sick family members.

Another area to consider is the interruption of businesses. If 40 percent of your employees are absent that will impact the delivery of goods you need to run your business. This will especially affect your supply chain.

## Group action

Stimulate group discussion on what other services may be affected, and capture this information on a flip chart.

### How to maintain operations during a pandemic

By protecting the health and safety of your employees, you can help protect your company's business and lessen a pandemic's impact. Pandemic planning is critical to prepare for limited business operations.

#### Develop a plan

When designing a pandemic emergency plan, consider these options:

- Identify a pandemic management team.
- Identify key staff members and backups for decision making and operations.
- Identify the operation's key elements that a pandemic may affect:
  - Evaluate supply-chain issues;
  - Assess critical service provider needs;
  - Determine power, water, food, supply needs, availability and alternatives;
  - Evaluate potential remote-computing capabilities;
  - Identify potential human resources issues specific to the site.
- Work with the local health department to identify potential business areas that need to be addressed.
- Prepare and plan for working with fewer employees.
- Work with your supply chain to ensure continued operations and services.
- Consider business continuity by working from your home.
- Identify your business-essential positions, and develop a strategy to ensure you fill these positions.

### What employees can do to stay healthy

These steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, such as the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to limit them from getting sick.
- If you do get the flu, stay home so you do not infect others.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth to keep the germs from spreading.

#### Summary

Develop a written plan and train your employees. To plan for you and your family members' well-being, consider using the check list that is available at <http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/checklist.html> Get informed. Be prepared.

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